



News Release

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Influenza Activity Widespread in Utah *It's Not Too Late to Get an Influenza Vaccine*

(Salt Lake City, UT) — According to Utah public health officials, influenza activity is now widespread. Utahns are urged to get an influenza vaccine, if they haven't already, and take other precautions to prevent the spread of influenza.

According to statewide influenza surveillance data collected by the Utah Department of Health (UDOH), influenza is now actively circulating in Utah. The number of visits for influenza-like illness has steadily increased for the past few weeks and has now risen above state threshold levels. Student absences have also risen above threshold levels. A threshold is an indicator that influenza has become widespread. Additionally, 37 hospitalizations associated with influenza have been reported to the UDOH this season.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Robert Rolfs said the degree of severity of this year's influenza season is not yet known. Similarly, public health officials cannot predict when the influenza season will peak or end.

"Because influenza is a serious illness, it's important to get your influenza vaccine now," said Linda Abel, Immunization Program Manager, UDOH. Influenza vaccine (flu shots and nasal flu spray) is your best protection and is still available in Utah, but it may be hard to get in some parts of the state. People should check with their health care provider and local health department to find vaccine.

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The UDOH, in partnership with Utah's 12 local health departments, uses several tools to track the presence of influenza in the community. The first is by checking with certain clinics for the number of people who have influenza-like illness. Public health officials also track school absenteeism. Finally, this year public health is counting the number of people hospitalized due to influenza. These numbers are collected and analyzed weekly.

Public health officials emphasize that simple steps can prevent the spread of influenza as well as other respiratory illnesses. "Influenza can be a very contagious and serious disease, especially in the very young and the elderly, but the spread of it can be prevented by taking simple steps," said Susan Mottice, Epidemiologist, UDOH.

Getting an influenza vaccine, staying home when you are sick, especially during the holidays when large gatherings are frequent, and using respiratory etiquette are all effective ways to limit the spread of influenza. Respiratory etiquette includes frequently washing your hands with soap and warm water, and covering your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue when you sneeze or cough.

If you think you have influenza (abrupt onset of fever, muscle aches and pains, cough and/or sore throat), you may wish to consult your physician within 24 hours. Prescription antiviral medications can reduce the duration and severity of influenza if taken within two days of when symptoms begin. If you get influenza, you should rest, drink plenty of liquids, avoid using alcohol and tobacco and take medication to relieve the symptoms. For more severe illness, especially in children and the elderly, consult your physician.

For more information about influenza, go to www.health.utah.gov/flu or contact your health care provider or local health department.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.